

Hebrews 12:18-24

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If we understand who God is, we should live not only basked in His love, but in the fear of His might.

Paul refers to a place revered by all Hebrews, Mount Sinai. But Paul makes it clear that we as believers, after the cross, stand before something much greater.

The *mountain that can be touched* refers to Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, where the Old Covenant was established. This mountain was terrifying to the Israelites. It was a place so holy, that even animals were forbidden from touching it. It was a physical location, a mountain that could be touched in the sense that it was a mountain on earth. It was an intimidating place, surrounded by *darkness and gloom and whirlwind*, because it had the presence of a holy God.

When the Ten Commandments were given, the people of Israel experienced all kinds of terror, as we see in [Exodus 20:18](#), “All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance.” God’s presence, law, and anger were impossible for them to bear. They could not stand to hear God’s voice, and even so near to His holy mountain. But we who are believers after the cross have come to something much more holy, and with much greater terror.

In contrast to the terror of Mount Sinai, Paul says our Covenant, the mountain we draw near to, is Zion. Here, *Mount Zion* represents the heavenly Jerusalem, the place where God reigns. It is the very assembly of God and His angels that we are in the presence of, spiritually. One day it will come down to the earth physically, where Jesus will reign as King ([Revelation 21:2](#)). When the people expressed fear to Moses at Mount Sinai because they feared death, Moses told them not to fear death. Rather, Moses told them to fear sinning ([Exodus 20:18-20](#)). If we properly view God, it should lead us to fear the immense negative consequences of sin.

The people of [Exodus 20](#) did not learn the lesson, and shortly after turned to worship the golden calf. As a result, that generation lost the reward of the

inheritance. But we stand before a much greater mountain, so should have a much greater fear. Our potential loss is immensely greater than mere land on earth. We stand before a great cloud of witnesses, *of the spirits of the righteous made perfect*, and, God, the great *judge of all*. Between them stands Jesus, *the mediator of the new covenant*, who shed his blood for us. Paul says that the “*sprinkled blood*” of Jesus *speaks better than the blood of Abel*. Here, he is referring to Genesis 4, where Abel was murdered by his brother Cain, and his blood was “crying out” for justice. But Jesus’ blood speaks even better of both truth and justice than the blood of Abel.

So, what will the verdict be for how we lived our lives? That question should drive our lives more than any other. To the extent we focus on being offended, leading to bitterness, or to satisfying appetites, like Esau, we stand to lose the reward of our inheritance before this mighty assembly. That is something to fear.

But we have the ability to overcome in Christ. We have Christ, the better Priest and better sacrifice. We can go *with confidence* before the throne of God, as written earlier in [Hebrews 4:16](#). But just as with Israel, we have a choice which way to turn. Paul is continually trying to encourage and empower his Hebrew audience to endure in this *New Covenant*. It is better in every conceivable way than the Old.

Biblical Text:

¹⁸ For you have not come to a *mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, ¹⁹ and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.” ²¹ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.” ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the righteous made perfect*, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood of Abel*.